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Key ideas on the Agenda 21 for culture

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0. Abstract

The Agenda 21 for culture was approved on 8 May 2004. It is the first document with worldwide mission that advocates establishing the groundwork of an undertaking by cities and local governments for cultural development.

This document appears at a time of growing relevance of local governments in national and international governance, and of increasing importance of the cultural challenges of our societies, challenges to which local governments, the government closest to citizens, are obliged to propose answers. In addition, it is a document with a catalysing potential: it puts in contact, and strengthens, the networks that in several regions of the world are building up the relationship between culture, democracy, citizenship, conviviality, participation and creativity.

It is being used, on the one hand, to reinforce and renew local cultural policies, and, on the other hand, to advocate national governments and international institutions on the importance of culture in local development.

The Agenda 21 for culture also claims for cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue to play a growing role in global governance.

1. The elaboration of the Agenda 21 for culture

The Agenda 21 for culture was agreed by cities and local governments from all over the world “committed to human rights, cultural diversity, sustainability, participatory democracy and creating conditions for peace”. It was approved by the 4th Forum of Local Authorities for Social Inclusion of Porto Alegre, held in Barcelona on 8 May 2004 as part of the first Universal Forum of Cultures.

From September 2002 until May 2004, the preliminary drafts of the Agenda 21 for culture had been discussed in various meetings and conferences organised by international networks. After its approval, the cities presented the document to United Nations – Habitat and UNESCO in a symposium organised by the World Urban Forum, as part of the Universal Forum of Cultures – Barcelona 2004, on 15 September 2004.

The world organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) adopted the Agenda 21 for culture as a reference document for its programmes on culture and assumed the role of coordinator of the process subsequent to its approval. The programme of UCLG’s Working Group on Culture for 2005-2007 aims “to promote the role of culture as a central dimension of local policies through the dissemination and implementation of the Agenda 21 for culture” (<http://www.cities-localgovernments.org>).

The Working Group on Culture is chaired by Ferran Mascarell, Councillor for Culture of Barcelona, and has two vice-presidencies, in the cities of Stockholm and Buenos Aires. The Working Group on Culture is made of cities such as Amman, Brazzaville, Córdoba, Diyarbakir, Essaouira, Kazan, Porto Alegre, Quito, Rio de Janeiro, Roma, Torino, Toronto and Venice, as well as several associations of municipalities.

The process has raised the interest of international organisations, national governments and civil society. The website <http://www.agenda21culture.net> hosts all the resources related, including translations of the document into several languages, articles, publications, news and events.

2. International context

Culture has assumed a very crucial role in the recent globalisation process. Population movements push the challenges of dialogue between cultures or civilisations to be transferred to a local scale, the technological revolution demands reconsidering the mechanisms of production and access to cultural goods and services, the processes of economic integration provoke a debate on the exceptional character of culture in world trade, the differences in income and the social exclusion are often associated with cultural aspects... The crucial role of culture in the globalisation process concerns us all, public and private sectors, and civil society, and leads us to reconsider our ideas, both on a worldwide and local scale.

Cultural diversity, a keyword

Since the mid nineties various initiatives have been debated to provide world governance with a more solid public cultural competence. The member states of the International Network of Cultural Policies, <http://www.incp-ripc.org>, and, at the same time, cultural society civil, grouped in two associations, the International Network for Cultural Diversity - <http://www.incd.net>, and the Coalition for Cultural Diversity, have urged UNESCO (<http://www.unesco.org>) to become the centre of these debates and to take over this emerging space.

In November 2001, the 31st General Conference of UNESCO unanimously adopted the “Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity”, a text without legislative value but with an enormous symbolic force for promoting and deepening these debates. In 2005, by an absolute majority of 148 votes in favour, 2 votes against and 4 abstentions, the 33rd General Conference of UNESCO adopted the “Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions”, a cornerstone in the process. The Convention explicits the relationship between human rights and cultural diversity, an absolute necessity to avoid the risk of fundamentalists using diversity as a

subterfuge for oppression. The Convention defines the long claimed double nature of cultural goods and services (economic but also cultural, “as vehicles of identity, values and meaning”), and this enables securing the right of states to establish cultural policies understood as public policies, taking steps to encourage the diversity of the cultural offer through subsidies or quotas. The Convention is a text with legal value that recognises its complementarity with other international legal instruments such as the World Intellectual Property Organisation or the World Trade Organisation. The Convention does not forget solidarity, and establishes an International Fund for Cultural Diversity which could potentially be a formidable impulse to international cooperation in culture.

A growing role for cities and local governments

Cities and the local governments cannot be absent from the debate on the role of culture in globalisation. Today, local policies are conditioned by international agreements on cultural goods and services. The vitality of the cultural offer in a city is partly conditioned by the possibility of implementing public cultural policies: without international regulatory frameworks which legitimise public action (as does the recently approved Convention), public cultural facilities and programmes could be challenged as unfair competition or distortion of the market. Furthermore, creative coexistence in the public spaces of a city not only has local bases, but also symbolic references in other parts of the world, both as a result of historical and current migration, and the media interconnection. Today's cities are the spaces where globalisation becomes clearly and immediately obvious.

There has been a growing presence of cities and local governments on the international political scene. Since the early decades of the 20th century, and specially since the end of the Second World War, cities have taken on growing international activity, with sister cities, initiatives in favour of peace and reconciliation (local diplomacy), the development of cooperation projects (decentralised cooperation) and the promotion of decentralisation and municipal autonomy. Over the last few years, as Jordi Borja and Manuel Castells mentioned in *Local global*, “there is a progressive acceptance of the legitimacy and right of cities, and especially their democratic governments, to act in international political, economic and cultural life. The recognition of this right is today a factor for the democratisation of international relations and is indispensable to efficiently implement the agreements and programmes of the international conferences and organisations”. The unification of world municipalism in Cities and Local Government Units (May 2004) has undoubtedly been a milestone. Various reports from the United Nations have repeatedly manifested the need for states and international and intergovernmental organisations to listen to the voice of the cities and work with them in the implementation of their strategies; the most recent examples are the report on the relationship of the United Nations with civil society, known as the

Cardoso Report (2004) or the Jeffrey Sachs Report (2005) on the Millennium Development Goals.

These reports recognise that cities and local governments have a priority role as elements of democratisation and efficiency. The citizens demand closer governments that are committed to democracy and provide services with efficiency. Cities and local governments work together sharing information, identifying initiatives or good practices, acting as a “second level diplomacy” in conflictive situations, campaigning for their requests to be heard. Far from identitarian or homogenising impulse that has characterised the immense majority of modern states, the essential roadmaps of cities are very similar, and this allows them today to act in the world both with the universalist formula “think globally, act locally”, as well as with its diversalist complementary “think locally, act globally”.

Think locally, act globally... in culture

Cities, though, are not states. The primary concerns of cities and local governments are associated with coexistence, conviviality and creative capacity in their territories. Cities and local governments are aware that a large part of the future of democracy and welfare is dependent on the existence of public spaces and spheres, and the possibilities of citizens and residents to participate. Participation in cultural life is one of these basic public spheres, and this is carried out (virtual participation aside) in contexts of proximity, in squares and streets, specific suburbs and cities, relating the local and global scope, memory and innovation, in a tense creative debate.

This relation between culture, democracy, citizenship, coexistence, participation and creativity, practically absent from the debates for cultural diversity presented by UNESCO and the states, appears as the cornerstone of Agenda 21 for culture. A document promoted by cities and local governments needed to focus on the junctures between these concepts as the basis of local cultural policies, rescuing the relationship between culture and development and legitimising the role of cities as on the international scene, complementing the role of states.

3. The contents of Agenda 21 for culture

The document is a political declaration of prime importance and responds, with ambition, to a political mandate expressed by the local governments heading the initiative. In the words of Ferran Mascarell, Councillor for culture of Barcelona, this political dimension “expresses the commitment of local governments in favour of a strong cultural reality as one of the best antidotes for confronting many of the social inequalities existing in our society (...), the great challenges of the present and, as everything seems to indicate, those of the future: more freedom, more creativity, better democracy, better development, more social justice, maximum inclusion, more participation to guarantee an

active, not only meditative, city. The fight for freedom and justice, development and inclusion is, and must never be otherwise, the fight for culture. And the fight for culture must be, above all, the fight for freedom, justice and development on a solidary human scale”.

The Agenda 21 for culture has 67 articles, divided into three large sections: principles (16 articles), undertakings (29 articles) and recommendations (22 articles). The “principles” section describes the relationship between culture and human rights, diversity, sustainability, participative democracy and peace. The “undertakings” section concentrates on the scope of local government responsibilities, and gives a detailed description of the request for centrality of cultural policies. The section on “recommendations” advocates for the renewed importance of culture, and demands that this importance be recognised in the programmes, budgets and organisational charts of the various levels of government (local, national / State) and by international organisations.

The following paragraphs reproduce the contents of Agenda 21 for culture from some of its key ideas.

Definition of culture and cultural rights

- "Culture takes on different forms, responding to dynamic models of relationship between societies and territories" (article 1), and “the cultural identity of each individual is dynamic” (article 13).
- “Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights (...). The cultural freedom of individuals and communities is an essential condition for democracy. No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon the human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope” (article 3). “The autonomous initiative of citizens, individually or in social entities and movements, is the basis of cultural freedom” (article 11).
- “The indispensable need to create the conditions for peace must go hand in hand with cultural development strategies. War, terrorism, oppression and discrimination are expressions of intolerance which must be condemned and eradicated” (article 6).
- The mechanisms, instruments and resources for guaranteeing freedom of speech. Respect for the rights of authors. The invitation to creators and artists to commit themselves to the city, improving coexistence and quality of life, increasing the creative and critical capacity of all citizens (articles 33 to 35).

Culture and governance

- The new central role of culture in society. Legitimacy of cultural policies. “The quality of local development depends on interweaving cultural and other public policies – social, economic, educational, environmental and urban planning” (article 10).

- Furthering democracy and local governance: “The main principles of good governance include transparency of information and public participation in the conception of cultural policies, decision-making processes and the assessment of programmes and projects” (article 5), “coexistence in cities is a joint responsibility of citizens, civil society and local governments (article 8).
- The improvement of assessment mechanisms in culture. System of cultural indicators (article 49 and others).
- The importance of networks and international cooperation. “Local governments work together in networks, exchanging practices and experiences and coordinating their actions” (article 4). The promotion of international cultural cooperation based on the principles of the reciprocity and multi-laterality (articles 44, 45, 57 and others).
- Establishment of mechanisms for the participation of local governments in the cultural policies and programmes of national governments and international organisations (articles 50, 51 and 58-66).

Culture, sustainability and territory

- The relation between culture and sustainability: “a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature” (article 2).
- The richness brought about by the diversity of cultural expressions. The importance of a wide cultural ecosystem, with diversity of origins, with public, private and associative agents, in the various sectors of culture: heritage, reading, arts, creative industries and the media (articles 17 to 20, and others).
- The “continuity and the development of indigenous local cultures, which are bearers of a historic and interactive relation with the territory”. At the same time, “the expression and participation of people with cultures from immigration or originally rooted in other areas”. Dialogue, coexistence and interculturality as the basic principles of the dynamics of citizen relationships (articles 21 to 24).
- The introduction of cultural parameters in the processes of urban planning. The importance of public spaces as spaces for interaction, coexistence and creativity (articles 25 to 27).
- The importance of local cooperation. Decentralisation of policies and resources dedicated to culture. The creative originality of the so-called peripheries. Cooperation between local governments sharing a territory (articles 28, 29, and others).

Culture and social inclusion

- Culture as a public sphere: “access to the cultural and symbolic universe at all stages of life, from childhood to old age, is a fundamental element in the shaping of sensitivity, expressiveness and coexistence and the construction of citizenship” (article 13).
- The relationship between culture and social inclusion. Expressiveness as a “basic dimension of human dignity and social inclusion without prejudice to gender, age, ethnic origin, disability, poverty or any other kind of discrimination” (article 22).
- Cultural participation as an element of full citizenship. Commitment to the generation and extension of the audiences (article 18).

Culture and economy

- Recognition of the economic dimension of culture. Importance of culture as a factor in the creation of wealth and economic development (article 12).
- The support for cultural agents, through different means and instruments. The financing of culture from various sources, such as subsidies, risk-capital funds, micro-credits, tax incentives... (article 20, and others).
- The “strategic role of the cultural industries and the local media for their contribution to local identity, creative continuity and job creation” (article 30).
- The relations between the cultural facilities and other entities working with knowledge, such as universities, research centres and research companies; promote programmes aimed at popularising scientific and technical culture (articles 40 and 41).

4. Local implementation of Agenda 21 for culture

The existence of the Agenda 21 for culture has brought about, in a short time, a notable series of initiatives. A growing number of cities and local governments have adhered to the Agenda 21 for culture in their local councils. This formal adhesion has enormous symbolic importance for a municipality. A document of adhesion to the Agenda 21 for culture is available from the web page <http://www.agenda21culture.net>.

Various international networks have divulged the document and adopted commitments, such as Eurocities, which in June 2005 recommended European cities to begin “local campaigns” based on the contents of Agenda 21 for culture. The document is being used by individual cities to develop the cultural aspects of their urban policies, such as in Bogotá (Colombia), Montreal (Quebec, Canada) or Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain).

A local cultural strategy

Local governments can choose between various alternatives when initiating local processes to adapt or implement international agreements. In the case of Agenda 21 for culture as an international commitment of “cities and local governments for cultural development” it seems that the concept of a “local cultural strategy” could be a good lever: it can be used within a prudent time period (mid-term), proposes methodologies based on cross-cutting issues and develops a wide conception of culture.

A local cultural strategy involves the drafting of a document for cultural planning, called cultural plan, strategic plan on culture or cultural strategy. Although the word “planning” may (and does) cause distrust in cultural areas, planning, is in fact carried out in multiple areas and in all organisations, including the one responsible for the municipal cultural policy, even though this concept is not explicit. Planning is the process that relates the agents, objectives, activities, resources and expected results that make up a project. Colin Mercer pointed out that “cultural planning does not imply planning culture, but rather a commitment so that cultural considerations are present in all local planning and development processes”. In general, cultural planning means:

- Detecting the different demands made by people and organisations in a territory, including cultural agents as well as the citizens as a whole
- Identifying and using cultural resources
- Offering responses based on analytical rigor, territorial coherence and consensus with civil society
- Establishing procedures for implementation and instruments for evaluation of the agreements assumed.

Over the last few years a large number of local governments have implemented local cultural strategies. It is possible to consult a summary of some of these plans on the web page <http://www.bcn.es/plaestrategicdecultura>, prepared by Barcelona City Council in 2006, for the local cultural planning process which includes the implementation of Agenda 21 for culture.

Transversality and participation

The content of a local cultural strategy depends to a great extent on the relative situation of the city in its cycle of development. In the history of local cultural policies it is possible to draw some stages undertaken in democratic countries, in a process where the concepts of a new stage do not cancel out, but rather reformulate the concepts (and the institutions and mechanisms) of previous periods. (1) From the 50's and early 60's: cultural policies were defended for arts' sake. Culture and art must be spread to all (democratisation of culture). Strong formal separation between high culture and popular cultures. (2) From the end of the 60's and early 70's. Social movements erect cultural democracy

as an alternative paradigm. Citizen cultural practices are legitimised and/or promoted. Attention is given to decentralisation, from the centre (of the state or city) to the peripheries. (3) From the mid 70's and the 80's. The economy reaches the world of culture, which must prove its usefulness and its contribution to the creation of added value and employment. Increase of cultural management. (4) Since the 90's. Urban regeneration. Need for a city to renew its image, new facilities, interest in the contribution of culture to civic pride. Increase of cultural tourism. Large, spectacular events. Interest for cultural and creative industries. (5) Since the end of the 90's. Complexity. Strategic planning in culture. City of knowledge, creative city. Growing interest in the processes of cultural production: interculturality and coexistence.

The appearance of Agenda 21 for culture reinforces, perhaps, two concepts in the development of a local cultural strategy: transversality and participation.

In regard to transversal or cross-cutting issues: if culture is to provide many of the responses to the challenges of society, if culture must be at the centre of local policies... culture departments must be equipped with strong tools, ambitious plans that have a clear vocation to influence other local planning tools. This ambition does not mean abandoning the intrinsic values of culture (creativity, memory, rituality, excellence, quality, critical content...) and the sectors associated (arts, heritage, creative industries) but rather to value them (with new "roadmaps") and use them as a lever to stand the sector up, and influence other fields, areas and sectors. This transversal ambition could lead culture to becoming the fourth pillar of development, as John Hawkes mentions, beside the already consolidated economic, social and environmental pillars.

As for the concept of participation, over the last few years, the complexity of reality, the change from production-oriented to relational-oriented governments, and the dynamism of civil society, among other factors, have reinforced the need to create mechanisms for local participation and cooperation. In the cultural field, there is already a vast tradition of communication between the public sector and organisations of the private and associative sectors. Agenda 21 for culture brings about the need to reconsider who the agents of participation are, including organisations and associations that do not strictly act as cultural agents, such as for example, new citizen groups, schools and training centres, local media, new technology companies... and an implication of citizens, both from cultural audiences as well as those that do not belong to cultural audiences. Venturelli claims that today, in cultural policies, "the most significant question is the possibility that a majority of people in a society participate in originating new cultural forms. The existence of environmental conditions that promote originality and synthesis, and the social depth of the participation in the formation of new ideas are the final proof of the cultural vigour and essential base of public policy".

In the need of frameworks

The content of a local cultural strategy will also depend on the existence of state, national and/or regional frameworks and regulations. Over the last few years, the leadership of Canada and Australia at the close of the 20th century, has now been enhanced by innovations in the United Kingdom, Flanders and France, for example. In the United Kingdom (in fact, England and Wales), the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, has, since 2000, recommended to local governments the drafting of a “local cultural strategy”, provided a guidance document and announced that the existence and implementation of a local cultural strategy would score positively in the systems for the assessment of municipal public action (and consequently on municipal financing). Similarly, in Flanders, since 2001, there is a programme of support for the creation of cultural plans; just like in the English case: they are not obligatory although the benefiting municipalities must comply with minimum requirements in providing cultural infrastructure (libraries, arts, heritage) and create a local council on cultural affairs; in compensation, the municipalities receive special resources from the government. In France, the legislation on inter-municipal cooperation has brought about the drafting of cultural policies of metropolitan scope (Lille, Lyon) as well as metropolitan agreements for the management of cultural equipment.

The Working Group in Culture of United Cities and Local Governments has proposed drafting, during 2006, a guidance document for the elaboration of a local cultural strategy based on Agenda 21 for culture. This document will necessarily contain generic recommendations, as they must be potentially used by cities from all over the world.

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